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ABSTRACT

Language used in the home domain of Sindhis in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was studied. Migration patterns have resulted in the Sindhis becoming a linguistic minority in many parts of the world as well as in India. In this study actual speech patterns of parents toward their children and between spouses was observed, and a questionnaire was distributed to each family. The language use data of the case study confirmed that a language shift to English is occurring in the home domain; on an intergenerational level the use of Sindhi was observed only among the 50-year-olds. It is noted that sociolinguistically the Sindhi community is in a situation of language shift and language loss as people use English more and more in the social lives, to the near exclusion of Sindhi except in communication with elders. Contains 6 references. (LB)

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International Conference on Bilingualism Organized by University Brunei Darussalam Brunei, December 1991

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The Sindhis in Malaysia — Language Maintenance, Language Loss Or Language Death?

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Sind today forms part of Pakistan and Sindhi is a North-west Indo-Aryan language. The Hindu and Sindhi community of Sind now in Pakistan is now dispersed not only in Kuala Lumpur, but in Hong Kong, Lagos, London, Singapore, St. Martin and St. Thomas. This migration of the Sindhis from their homeland is partly due to the creation of Pakistan in 1947 which resulted in riots and migrations. Historically, the rudiments of Sindhi culture can be found in the civilization represented by the ancient site Mohen-jo-Daro dating back to the third millennum B.C.

In 1988 there were two million Sindhis in India and 350,000 overseas. In Hong Kong of the 451,800 Indians, a large proportion 350,000 are Sindhis. The Sindhis are a linguistic minority not only in many parts of the world but also in India. A Sindhi linguist, Daswani, 1983 did a study of usage patterns of Sindhis in India and comes to the conclusion that Sindhi is a restricted code used in very limited social domains for communication.

He says that 'In many homes because of younger generation pressure the home language Sindhi is being replaced by English or another international language'. The decline in the use of Sindhi in India makes one wonder of the process of extinction has not already set in. If this was the case in India - what could be the situation in which the Sindhis in Malaysia find themselves?

A Kuala Lumpur Case Study

In Kuala Lumpur the Sindhi community which numbers 250 (about half of the total Sindhi population of Malaya) consists of 80 families.

The focus of this study is on the Kuala Lumpur Sindhis as the number of Sindhi families in Kuala Lumpur is the largest as compared to other parts of Malaysia. (Kuala Lumpur - 80 families, Penang - 29 families, Ipoh - 4 families, Malacca - 4 families, Kuala Terengganu - 1 family, Kota Bharu - 1 family).

The Sindhis in Kuala Lumpur are mainly merchants especially in the textile industry, though the younger generation is moving more towards professional fields and there are now about seven lawyers, four doctors, one future market speculater, two lecturers, two beauticians etc amongst the Sindhi community.

Mixed marriages are a constant source of language shift and it is noted that about 20% of the 80 odd families in Kuala Lumpur have married out of the community. Inter-community marriages is constantly, if not rapidly increasing, because of the countless possibilities for contacts with members of other communities and also because of the high dowry system more Sindhi girls are marrying out of the community than are Sindhi men. Language use in such households was not the focus of this initial preliminary study as it was felt that without a common language between the spouses inevitably either Englih or Malay would be used in the home domain.

The attribution rate in the loss of the language to some extent caused by such mixed marriages is inevitable in a minority community.

"Domains are a powerful tool for analyzing language and language shift " (Fishman, 1972) The focus of the study was on the language used in the home domain - the language used by mothers to their children. Language used between spouses was also investigated as was the language used between grandparents-grandchildren in the joint family system, which is still prevalent amongst some Sindhi families.

In short, the language used in the home domain was the focus of this study since any maintainence of a minority group's language must be the use of the mother tongue in the home domain.

Actual speech patterns of parents towards their children and between spouses was observed. If only English is used by parents, then a clear case of shift is observed by the generations.

The failure to use one's own mother tongue poses a great danger to mother tongue shift if the language used in the home domain itself between mother/child, husband/wife is NOT the mother tongue. A child learns his language from the behaviour of adults and peers. There cannot be a shift between parent and child unless the parents are first bilingual.

Methodology

The researcher visited houses where the children were still young to observe the language used in the home domain.

In addition to the unstructured informal visit' a questionnaire was also distributed to each family at the 1990 annual get together of the Sindhis in Kuala Lumpur.

During the informal social visit which the researcher, as a member of the community could make with no questions asked, the researcher did not really use elicitation techniques but just observed language use in the home domain. There was a need to back up the questionnaire findings with an observation survey since what people do with speech (language usage) and what people think they do with language (language image) and what people claim they do with speech (language posture) is not always the same.

Findings

If Sindhi parents only use Sindhi in speaking to their children then no shift has occured between the generations. Parents can only use a non-native language if they are bilingual themselves. In fact about 60% of the respondents between the age of 20-50 said that English was the language first spoken by them as compared to the respondents in the 51-75 age group who all-100% cited Sindhi as their first language. It is important to recognize the implications of this finding. Moreover over three-quarters of the respondents in the 20-50 age group said that English was the language they spoke best though again all of the respondents in the older age group i.e. 51-75 said that Sindhi was the language they spoke best. In fact 37.5% of the respondents in the 20-30 age group admitted speaking Sindhi poorly as compared to 25% in the 31-50 age group. The findings that a substantial number of parents cited English as their first language would obviously have ramifications on the language they themselves used in interaction with their spouses, and children.

Table 1: Language used with children

Language used by parents to children

Age group	Language Used	Percentage
31-50	English	75%
	English/Sindhi	2 %
51-75	English	50%

Table 2: Language First Spoken

Age Group	Language Used	Percentage
20-50	English	60%
51-75	Sindhi	100%

Overall children of migrant families speak the minority language at home until they begin school (Clyne 1985) This is however not true of the Sindhis in Kuala Lumpur. 69% of the married respondents spoke English to their children and this included almost half of the respondents even in the 51-75 age group. In the 31-50 age group 75% of the respondents of this age group spoke English with their children while the remaining 25% reported English/Sindhi use (note not Sindhi/English use.) When a mother said, "I'll speak Sindhi with you". (in English) the daughter's reply was "That's bad news." The same respondent replied in Malay to her grandmother though she appeared to understand what was said to her in Sindhi. The grandmother, as do a number of Sindhi grandmothers, accomadated to the language code of the grandchild, and also used Malay in their discourse with the grandchildren. Sindhi grandfathers however, for the most part, used English with their grandchildren.

In extended families, Sindhi children were growing up in a bilingual/trilingual environment where English, Malay and Sindhi were heard (Sindhi between the grandparents or between the mother and the mother-in-law), Malay among the young cousins attending government schools and English between the parents and the children but in nuclear families with mothers up to the age of fourties and slightly, over English was used not only between mother and child/children but also between spouses so that the children only heard Sindhi only when the older kin visited.

There is a great deal of language variety, accomadation and convergence in the society. Father-in laws speak in English with daughter-in-laws and a daughter-in law respondent from India reported that her father-in-law only spoke in Malay with her as he wanted her to learn the language as she was helping in the family business and had to know Malay for pragmatic reasons whereas her mother-in-law communicated with her in Sindhi and her husband spoke only in English! Grandmothers speak in

English/Malay with their grandchildren depending on their own proficiency in English/Malay though more appeared to be more proficient in Malay than in English and there was a case of a Sindhi grandmother who appeared to be so fluent in Malay that she was codemixing Malay/Sindhi in discourse even with her own 39 year old daughter. One Sindhi grandmother talked to the elder nine year old grandson, who had started school in Malay (the medium of instruction in government schools) wheras with her younger grandson she conversed in English as he was attending a kindergarden where English was the medium of instruction. The same grandmother spoke to her 37 year old daughter in Sindhi but got replies in basically English with a couple of culturally-based lexical items in Sindhi.

Sindhi has no instumental value to the community though many Sindhi mothers admitted that they had made a mistake as Sindhi had an affective/symbolic value. Some Sindhi mothers had even told the grandmothers of the kids to speak in Malay to their children because Malay is an important school language. Another grandfather and his 35 year old son told the researcher that they were intentionally speaking in English with the granddaughter/daughter as the schoolteacher had advised them to do so (the child is attending a private English medium school). Being a pragmatic business-minded community this pragmatism is also reflected in language use where the object in language learning and use appears to be instrumental. Parents use English and grandmothers generally use Malay with the result that the kids are fluent in these languages but not in the ancestral language which is undergoing language shift if not slow death. Sindhi will be lost because even those who know it do not use it (with the exception of the 60s who use it amongst that age group even though they will switch to English when speaking to younger Sindhi interlocuters) When asked why Sindhis use English when they know Sindhi a 54 year old respondent said "They want to show off they are modern" and a 40 year old respondent said "My husband wants me to be 'Anggeris' (English) use pants, speak English."

At a meeting of the Ladies Wing of the Sindhi Association of Malaysia, which was inaugrated earlier this year, and whose chief objective was to encourage the use of the language by organising Sindhi classes ,a 40 year old committee member said very openly, "I'm sorry I c'ant speak in Sindhi," and although the committee had the best of intentions to use Sindhi the switch to English came very soon after the initial address in Sindhi.It therefore appears that even in intracommunity gatherings English is the preferred mode of communication.

In a two-hour long Ladies Wing meeting the entire discourse was in English except:

a. when quoting somebody older who had used Sindhi
b. some lexical items especially food items for example "chutney, pokoro"
c. linkers example, "maana tha " (that is)
d. scolding example, "chari ai (she's mad), "mathe mae sur dindi ai (she gives me a headache)

Thus it can be seen that certain lexical items especially, food/curse items are retained as the languge changes function and is being replaced by another.

Peer group activity is in English except among the late 50s and upwards and even the older respondents converge towards the language of their younger interlocuters. The emcee (in her late thirties) in the 1990 annual Sindhi get together spoke only in English as did the President,(late 40s) as did the chairman(mid - fourties) of the organising committee. A Sindhi drama performed at the gathering clearly depicts the language situation in the home domain where the mother speaks to her son in Sindhi and he replies in English and the many girls "displayed" to him for marriage also speak in English. If intergenerational language transmission is no longer done in the home setting then the mother-tongue will become reduced to a pidgin. At present pidgin Sindhi (admittedly an impressionistic view) is being spoken by some 30 year olds.

In the replacive situation the second language eventually fulfills all of the individual's communicative needs so that he doesn't use his native tongue nor pan it to his descendents. (Fishman, 1972) Sindhis see the benifit of speaking the dominant business language- English/Malay but even in intra-group encounters Sindhis in their 40s do not use much of their mother-tongue and the conversation is predominantly in English. At the ladies monthly high-tea get-together English is much more used than Sindhi. Among the educated and cosmopolitan Kuala Lumpur Sindhis Sindhi is used only for communication with the older generation and even then some of the latter tend to accomodate and converge to the language used by their younger interlocuter. One of the olders in the community, a seventy year old widower, said that he hardily used Sindhi in the home domain as his son (late 30s) did not know Sindhi and that he only used Sindhi in interactions with his own age group. Another 70 year old lady started replying in English when the researcher spoke to her in Sindhi.

The functional dominance of English in the home domain has been established and is simultaneously accompanied by reduced language competence across the generations to the point

where I think it would be quite fair to say that English has become the vernacular for the great majority of the Sindhi people. There are no monolingual speakers of Sindhi any longer and no children are growing up with Sindhi as their only language. Older people (over 50s) are generally fully competent in Sindhi and many of them have fairly good (sufficient for communication), levels of Malay/English proficiency with the older ladies being more proficient in Malay and the older men more proficient in English.The argument for language maintenance is to facilitate communication with the older generation (a reason given by most respondents) but the reality is that this objective to maintain the language is not really neccessary as many of the older folk can speak either Malay or English or both.

For the young generation English is the first language and Sindhi is not even the second language but the third language . Some children attending a private international school told me " I have only one language - English," and a nine year old boy when asked in Sindhi "Tinjo nalo cha aye?" (what is your name?) after a very long pause and much cajoling, not due to shyness as we had had an animated discussion minutes before that in English replied, "Minjo nalo Dinesh". (My name Dinesh) The auxilliary verb was missing. In the first Sindhi class such simple structures were taught and the Sindhi teacher ended using more English than Sindhi because "otherwise they don't understand".

English is the language of international communication and English is accorded prestige by this moblie international merchant community. Malay is also known and is used especially by the older generation when communicating with their grandchildren and also among the young siblings who attend government school. The use of English, Malay and Sindhi by the society shows a great degree of flexibility and manipulation in adjusting to situational needs on the part of the older respondents and members of the community. Unfortunately however, the younger generation seems to have lost out as those in private international schools are becoming more monolingual-English though those who go to government medium schools appear to be equally proficient in Malay and English.

When the written language is a lost art this is the first sign of language loss. No one in the 20-30 age group could read or write Sindhi and only 37.5% in the 31-50 age group could read and write Sindhi wheras 100% of the respondents in the 51-75 age group could do so.

Table 3: Knowledge of Written Script

Age Group	% Who Know Script
31-50	37.5%
51-75	100%

The respondents in the younger age group i.e. 20-30 reported reading in English/Malay while those in the 31-50 age group read English books as compared to the older respondents who read in Sindhi/Hindhi/English. The Sindhi Script consists of any of the following:

a. Persio_arabic script.
b. Devanagari script.
c. Gurumkhi script.

In Malaysia generally the first is used but only a handful of Sindhis in the 40s can read and write Sindhi. Although this has given rise to great concern amongst the older generation especially with regards to who will be able to read the "sukuhmani" (holy book) etc during the communal prayer sessions, normally held in homes, the President of the Sindhi Association in a meeting with the researcher in 1990, stated that he would be more than pleased if the younger generation could speak Sindhi. "They don't even know the difference between tu (you) and thavi (you-respect)".

Summary of findings

The language use data of the case study confirmed that a language shift to English is occuring in the home domain while on an intergenerational level the use of Sindhi only was observed only among the 50s. The home domain for the most part, is close to becoming an English domain.Pauwels 1986:14 states that "if less than 50% of L1 is registered the domain is considered an L2 domain as a result of language shift..." From a sociolinguistic perspective the Sindhi community is in a situation of language shift and language loss as people use English more and more in their social lives to the almost exclusion of Sindhi which has

come to be restricted to communication with the olders, who for their part are also helping in language loss, as they also for the most part know Malay/English and accomodate to the language choices of the younger generation.

The attrition rate i.e. the loss of language especially of minority groups has been noted in the literature and the Sindhis appear to be no exception to this phenomena. It appears then that the Sindhis are committing language genocide. Although Sindhi classes have recently been organised a population cannot be artificially induced to keep its linguistic tradition and the drop-out rate is high. Mothers when asked why the children were not turning up said "They get too much home-work from the school and have to do that first" or "They don't understand what is being said in the Sindhi classes" and they will not unless mothers start using Sindhi in the home domain- a nigh impossible task as many mothers admitted they spoke more English than Sindhi and were more comfortable in the former. The problem is surely compounded when spouses in their 20s 30s and 40s appear also to be more proficient and comfortable in English and English is the medium of communication between the spouses. Middle aged people i.e.in their 40s who have had an English medium of instruction in the then colonial (British) school system have excellent English and for the most part are surely English dominant i.e. they use more English than Sindhi and English appears to be the language of even their personal prayers. Younger adults (over 20s are both English and Malay dominant (those who went to Malay Medium government schools) and there are more semi=speakers of Sindhi among them (based on impressionistic evaliuation) than there are fully competent fluent speakers. (An example cited was instead of using the lexial item for nose ring "phuli" a young man in his early twenties translated and said "naka ji mundi " ie the ring for the nose). 37.5% of the respondents in the age group of 20-30 admitted Sindhi was spoken poorly as compared to 25% of those in the 31-50 age group. Children are virtually all English/Malay speakers and although they may understand bits and pieces of the Sindi language they can hardily use it.

Table 4: Admission Of Language Spoken Poorly
(Questionnaire Findings)

Age Group	Language	Percentage
20-30	Sindhi	37.5%
31-50	Sindhi	25%

The intergenerational continuity of transmission of Sindhi to the children has definitely been broken. Some mothers openly admitted that they could not use Sindhi with their children as their own Sindhi fluency and competence was poor. The present situation of Sindhi must be judged as perilous and its chances for long term survival are not good because it does not appear to have a self-reproducing speech community. Sindhi is limited to talk with the older generation and even then only if the latter do not know any other language, which is generally not the case.

Respondents do accord Sindhi a high measure of value as a salient symbol of their distinctive social identity and cultural heritage but however they do not appear to support that ideology by practice. They, for the most part, go on speaking mainly in English to their children and among themselves. Some 44 year old mothers admitted freely that they not only speak in English with their kids but also used to do so with their mothers when they were growing up. The present generation of 20-40 year olds appear to be more proficient and comfortable in English and chances of their offspring speaking in Sindhi to them or vice-versa are slim. 75% of respondents in the 20-50 age groups said that English was the language spoken best as contrasted to the respondents in the 51-75 age group who all (100%) said that Sindhi was their best language. When the entire community becomes bilingual the original language i.e. Sindhi it appears will become superfluous. With the demise of the older generation it appears to be only a matter of time before the Sindhi language in Kuala Lumpur dies. The East Indian communities in the Carribbean have largily discarded their mother-tongue after three or more generations (Tinker 1977:13) and it appears that the Sindhi community in Kuala Lumpur is doing it in practically two generations! Ager cited in Haugen: 250 said that when people give up their language this is " tantamount to cultural delay." The question therefore which interested me was whether with language loss will cultural values and bonds of communal cohesiveness and ethnicity be lost? It appears not in this case. Although they do not have a homeland to identify with and perhaps because of this the Kuala Lumpur Sindhi community is cohesive. Neighbours and friends can still be relied on and depended upon in times of need. Funerals etc. and special celebrations e.g. ceremonies relating to births, marriages and home rituals are attended by many. Intra-community interaction is intensive e.g. high teas, birthday parties, introducing a new bride to the community etc. Apart from social get togethers religious ceremonies like bhajans, havans, etc are also frequent as is a ladies group who plays cards daily! As Haugen 1957 :277 said " paradoxical as it may sound, it ...a Norwegian activity does not

become any less Norwegian even if English is given the place of honour." The same could be said of an English speaking Sindhi community. Many of the traditional customs and notions are still adhered to and the religion still appears to have a strong hold on the community. This is reflected in the monthly chand functions held at the Ipoh Road temple on full moon day where the Sindhis cook and distribute food for the rest of the Sindhi congregation. Incidentally, English orthography is found in the temples and in the hymns! One of the parameters of ethnicity is a sense of common religious faith and the religion and its many ceremonies provide an opportunity for the Sindhis to interact.

The social networks of the K.L. Sindhis are not limited to Malaysia and include those in the States, Singapore, Indonesia, etc. Being an international community, with a high degree of commercial contacts and constantly travelling for trade and social purposes the English Language has become their preferred mode of communication.

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